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WORKING GROUP ON INTERNATIONAL
STATISTICAL PROGRAMMES AND
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Item 14 of the provisional agenda*

PROVISIONAL AGENDA AND DOCUMENTATION FOR THE THIRTIETH SESSION OF THE STATISTICAL COMMISSION

Report on the planned future international institute for statistics of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the Working Group the report by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) on the future international institute for statistics. UNESCO proposes that this matter be included on the agenda of the Statistical Commission at its thirtieth session.

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STRATEGIC PLAN FOR THE STRENGTHENING OF UNESCO s

STATISTICAL PROGRAMMES AND SERVICES

Information note prepared by UNESCO

This note has been prepared on the basis of UNESCO document 29 C/57 which was submitted to the twenty-ninth session of the General Conference (October-November 1997) and also presents the resolution adopted by the General Conference on this matter. The full document is available upon request by contacting 'statistics@unesco.org'.

1. For several years, many UNESCO Member States and the General Conference itself have been expressing their desire to see a strengthening, improvement and modernization of UNESCO's statistical services. In 1994, the Director-General sought the advice of the Board on International Comparative Studies in Education (BICSE) which conducted an in-depth review of the situation. The Director-General then consulted various experts - representatives of the Member States and of United Nations institutions and development agencies - concerning the follow-up to be given to these recommendations. This wide-ranging consultation process formed the basis of the elaboration of a strategic plan for the strengthening of UNESCO's statistical programmes and services.

2. The strategic plan was submitted to the Executive Board for consideration at its 152nd session (September 1997) and subsequently to the 29th session of the General Conference (October - November 1997). The General Conference took note of the «Strategic plan for the strengthening of UNESCO's statistical programmes and services» and adopted the attached resolution (Annex).

3. As reflected in the adopted resolution, Member States insisted that the Director-General's report to the 154th session of the Executive Board (April - May 1998) on modalities for setting up the UNESCO International Institute for Statistics should be based on consultations with national and international services and institutions. It should include information not only on the financial and managerial aspects, but also on the proposed work programme and expected partners of the Institute, so as to facilitate, upon approval by the Board, the rapid implementation of the required transformation.

4. The central objective of the Institute should be to provide countries and the international

community with an internationally comparable information base in support to policy-making in the areas of education, science, culture and communication. This objective implies a shift of emphasis from a mere collection of data to a purposeful structuring of information in the form of policy-related indicators, which should constitute the over-arching framework for the collection, analysis and utilization of data. These indicators are to be developed through a collaborative, interactive process with member countries and related organizations.

5. The Institute would take advantage of UNESCO's decentralized networks (field units, National Commissions, associate institutions) to modulate its objectives and adapt its methods to the regional and subregional contexts. Obviously, the Institute's efforts should focus, in an initial stage, on the development of a world education indicators programme, an area where there is a pressing demand as well as better data availability. Nevertheless, a strong impetus would also have to be given to the development of indicators on science and technology as well as on culture and communication.

6. The Institute should pursue its core objective at two levels simultaneously. On the one hand, it must assist countries to build and improve their information infrastructure with the necessary support and tools in order to construct and adapt relevant indicators and accordingly collect and analyse related data. On the other hand, it must build and maintain an international, indicator-related database that is reliable, timely, user-friendly and easily accessible.

7. Member States expressed strong support for the proposed operational principles which should govern the statistical programmes and the future Institute. Particular reference was made to the need to ensure high professional standards, guarantee intellectual autonomy, mobilize partnerships, associate UNESCO institutes and field offices in programme implementation and improve institutional cooperation with a view to developing innovative approaches.

ANNEX

Resolution adopted by the UNESCO General Conference at its 29th session
(October - November 1997)

The General Conference

1. Noting the increasing demand from Member States and the international community for diversified, timely, reliable and policy-relevant statistical products and services in all UNESCO's fields of competence,

2. Conscious of the necessity to improve the statistical information base required to facilitate the monitoring of progress towards the goals set at major world conferences,

3. Considering the need to reinforce linkages with national statistical services and interested partner agencies, as well as to develop a highly participatory and interactive approach for the identification of indicators and for the collection and production of data, so as to guarantee their quality and their value to those formulating and evaluating policy,

4. Reaffirming that the central mission of UNESCO is to service both the Member States and the international community by providing quality statistical information in support of

policy-making and of programme formulation and monitoring in the areas of education, science, culture and communication,

5. Convinced that in order to fulfil its mission, UNESCO should focus on

(a) supporting the development of statistical and related analytical capacities in Member States;

(b) fostering professional consensuses with respect to international standards of statistical quality and reliability;

(c) ensuring the worldwide collection, production, analysis and dissemination of reliable, policy-relevant data and indicators on education, science, culture and communication;

(d) fostering the production of analytical studies aimed at facilitating the quantitative and qualitative assessment of the current situation and future prospects in UNESCO's fields of action;

6. Aware of the need to reorient and upgrade UNESCO's statistical services in order to respond appropriately to the new demands and challenges, and to enforce high standards of accuracy and timeliness of data;

7. Noting that the strategic plan proposed by the Director-General to strengthen UNESCO's statistical services has been prepared on the basis of in-depth consultations held with various experts from Member States and representatives of United Nations institutions and development agencies,

8. Taking into account decision 3.2 adopted by the Executive Board at its 152nd session,

9. Authorizes the Director-General to commence, on an experimental basis, the establishment of structures and mechanisms aimed at transforming the Division of Statistics into a UNESCO International Institute for Statistics, with a view to formally adopting the Statutes of the Institute at its thirtieth session;

10. Invites the Director-General:

(a) to carry out further consultations with national and international statistical institutes;

(b) and taking into account the results of their consultations, to submit to the Executive Board, at its 154th session, for its approval, a detailed report and proposals on the Institute's objectives, work programme and administrative, managerial and financial aspects.